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Concerns about a proposed new federal rule and a report that could end the ban on train locomotive horn-blowing in 50 Chicago area suburbs were raised Monday by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park.

Kirk voiced his doubts about the rules and the new report after meeting with several north suburban mayors and Federal Railroad Administrator Allan Rutter in Arlington Heights.

The mayors "raised serious concerns about the availability and accuracy of current data, qualifications of current and new quiet zones, and the additional costs to install Supplemental Safety Measures," Kirk said in a statement.

A preliminary federal report lists 50 suburbs whose quiet zones do not meet proposed standards to keep horn bans in place, he said.

The rule includes a "Quiet Zone Calculator" that several city managers "found difficult to access," Kirk said.

In addition, omissions and inaccuracies were found regarding some crossings, he added.

For example, the Quiet Zone Calculator "incorrectly classified one crossing on Lake-Cook Road as only having gates and flashing lights when, in reality, rail-grade separation has been complete for some time," Kirk said.

The calculator "provides no guidance on the use of alternative safety measures, such as education and photo enforcement," Kirk said. Some communities say estimates to install supplemental safety measures are substantially underestimated, he said.

"We cannot potentially burden local governments and taxpayers with millions of dollars in upgrades based on data with such inaccuracies, omissions and outdated evidence," Kirk said. "Unsecured crossings must be secured. Unsafe crossings with a ... record of accidents must be addressed but safe crossings with no record of accidents and sufficient safety equipment should continue to be exempt from blowing train whistles without costing taxpayers a fortune."

The comment period for the Interim Final Rule was set to expire today. Municipalities can now submit comments to the FRA until April 19.

The Final Rule is scheduled to take effect Dec. 18, 2004 but communities with existing horn bans will have at least five years to implement the requirements, Kirk said.